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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 005258

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SUBJECT: DISENGAGEMENT SITUATION REPORT, AUGUST 25, 2005

REF: TEL AVIV 5253

This is a joint message from Embassy Tel Aviv and Consulate General Jerusalem.

This message is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

This message conveys information as of 1600 hours local time.

1. (SBU) Summary: Israeli disengagement is proceeding, with demolition of remaining settlements underway. Israeli focus has now turned to the situation of evacuees in Israel, and on political maneuvering post-disengagement. A gun battle that ensued during an Israeli operation near Tulkarm overnight resulted in the deaths of five Palestinians, prompting strong Palestinian reactions, including a threat of revenge from Palestinian Islamic Jihad. End Summary.

12. (SBU) DISENGAGEMENT STATUS

-- The situation in Gaza is generally calm and quiet. All settlements there have been evacuated. Demolition work has continued without incident.

-- About 100 evacuees from the Gaza settlement of Netzer Hazani plan to maintain the protest tent that they have set up close to the central train station in Tel Aviv. The evacuees said they would agree to leave only after receiving a government promise for a communal housing solution.

-- The government is considering acceding to a request by 40 evacuee families from the Gush Katif settlement of Atzmona to establish a large temporary community in the Netivot area, where the "Ir Ha'emuna" ("City of Faith") tent city now stands.

-- Removal of toxic materials in Sa Nur and Homesh was scheduled to begin on August 24, to be followed by the demolition of residences, according to UN reports.

-- Palestinian groups in the Gaza Strip have accused Israel of burying "toxic materials" under the rubble of dismantled settlements, according to press reports (reftel). GOI Ministry of Environment contact told econoff that the MOE can not and will not respond to such accusations in the media. A GOI official said that if the Palestinians were serious about such accusations, they would file an official complaint with details to back up the charges. The contact added that MOE personnel have inspected demolition sites in Gaza "once or twice" in the past week. Although not every small violation (e.g., a bottle of ammonia left on a kitchen counter) might have been noticed, there have been no reports of large items, such as barrels of toxic materials, being found.

-- UNRWA reported that the IDF started demolishing greenhouses in the Netsa Khazani settlement. Such action would be contrary to GOI commitments to the Quartet Special Envoy's (OSE) team that the IDF would not destroy any greenhouses and -- if verified -- could result in a reduction in the compensation payment. The Israeli assessor hired by the private donors who purchased the Gush Khatif greenhouses will return to Gaza on August 28 to start a four-day assessment.

13. (SBU) SECURITY SITUATION

Jerusalem:

-- Death/Injury: An assailant stabbed to death a British yeshiva student in the Old City; a second British student was seriously wounded. Initial media reports that the second victim was American were erroneous.

West Bank:

-- Deaths: Israeli security forces killed five Palestinians during what the IDF characterized as an attempted arrest operation in the Tulkarm refugee camp at 2335 hours on August 24. According to Palestinian sources, the IDF killed two PIJ militants and one al-Aqsa Brigades militant (who had recently been incorporated into the security services). A third PIJ activist reportedly sought by the IDF evaded capture. During ensuing clashes, two teenaged boys were also killed. The

Palestinian source reported that the Palestinians fired no shots at the IDF. Israeli officials said the suspects opened fire rather than face arrest.

-- Shootings: The IDF reported two shooting incidents overnight, one near Kadim village and the other east of an IDF outpost near Jenin.

Gaza Strip:

-- Rockets: Two rockets were fired at Israel between 1215 and 1230 from the Beit Hanoun district of the Gaza Strip on August 25, according to UNRWA. One Qassam rocket reportedly landed near the Negev town of Sderot. There were no casualties.

-- Shootings: The IDF reported two shooting incidents overnight, one at an IDF outpost near Kfar Darom and the other near Khan Younis.

14. (SBU) PALESTINIAN REACTIONS

-- PA Prime Minister Ahmed Quraya' condemned the August 24 Israeli action in Tulkarm in a media interview, calling it a brutal crime that is a clear proof that Israel is not interested in maintaining the truce. President Abbas similarly criticized the action. Palestinian Islamic Jihad spokesman Khalid al-Batsh vowed revenge for the killings in statements provided to the Cairo-based Middle East News Agency (MENA).

15. (SBU) GOI POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

-- Zvulun Orlev, from the National Religious Party, asked Attorney General Mazuz to order the release of all Israelis arrested in the course of disengagement. Earlier on August 25 Rabbi Ovadia Yosef asked President Katsav to pardon army dissidents and those arrested in the course of disengagement.

16. (SBU) BORDER CROSSINGS/HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

-- In general, most of the additional restrictions on movement imposed at the start of the disengagement remain in effect. However, the IDF continues to demonstrate flexibility, particularly for humanitarian cases.

-- Gaza Coastal Road: The Coastal road is now open with free movement of traffic in both directions, according to Palestinian sources.

-- Rafah Terminal: Rafah remains open for passenger movement in and out of Gaza, although coordination is still required for Palestinian males aged 16 to 35 years.

-- Erez crossing and industrial zone: According to Gaza private sector contacts, Erez remains officially closed to Palestinians, but the IDF continues to allow a small number of people to pass with prior coordination based on humanitarian/medical grounds. On August 25, 150 Palestinian workers were allowed to enter Israel. Factory workers were also permitted into the Erez industrial zone, according to Palestinian sources.

-- Abu Kholi junction: The junction remains closed during daylight hours until further notice. The IDF re-opened the crossing at 2255 hours on August 24 and closed it at 0500 hours on August 25.

-- Karni Terminal: Karni remains open on August 25.

-- Kissufim, the main crossing used to enter Gush Katif and Kfar Darom settlements, remains open only to traffic/persons leaving Gaza.

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